

*CTL's Monthly Newsletter keeps you updated on research-informed teaching strategies, events, and support available to everyone in the UMSL teaching community.*



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## Entering the Summer with Joy

*The article below, written by Assistant Director Jenna Alexander, explores the importance of joy in teaching and learning.*

As we wrap up the spring semester and look ahead to the summer, let us take this opportunity to slow down, rest, and reflect. In fact, as Sarah Rose Cavanagh explains in her [recent Chronicle of Higher Education article](#), the secret recipe for student success is “joy and rest - for professors.” She makes the case that faculty need to be well in order for students to be well. Emotions, both positive and negative, can spread quickly to and among students. In less successful classes, students and professors find themselves in toxic [spirals](#) of negativity and blame. More successful classes generate positive energy, excitement, joy, passion, and a sense of fulfillment for both students and faculty. Thus, we can be better teachers by protecting our own well-being. We can embrace sustainable teaching by utilizing practices that mutually benefit our students and ourselves. We can become more [trauma-aware](#) as educators by healing from our own traumas. We can incorporate student-centered practices that do not require too much of our own time or bandwidth. That approach may even be [an act of love](#). Cultivating joy can be a challenge, especially in a landscape of higher education that often prioritizes productivity over pleasure. Faculty face pandemic overwork, threats to tenure and academic freedom, new technologies like ChatGPT, and pervasive [burnout](#). Moreover, faculty are expected to navigate these challenges while conducting research, doing service, and providing high-quality and inclusive education. The work can feel daunting at times. Yet, in the words of Robin Kimmerer, author of [Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants](#), “even a wounded world holds us, giving us moments of wonder and joy.” In other words, we can choose joy over despair - and that choice can be radical in and of itself.

*For further information about how to bring joy into your teaching, see the "Three Teaching Intentions" section below.*

*Please note that the CTL will not distribute monthly newsletters over the summer. We will return to our regular distribution schedule in the fall.*

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# Three Teaching Intentions - The Joy Edition

*This section highlights activities, practices, or elements of course design to be implemented intentionally. Every suggestion will not be appropriate for every context. Please see our contact information at the bottom of the newsletter to set up an individual consultation, if you would like to discuss these ideas in more detail.*

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## Rest

First and foremost, make time to rest. Most of us in higher education experience drastic changes to the pacing and prioritization of our work when the summer arrives. Still, we recognize that most faculty (even those with nine-month contracts) do not have summers “off.” Faculty often spend the summer teaching, designing courses for the fall, taking on additional childcare responsibilities, writing, reading, and doing research. Faculty increasingly do administrative and clerical work as well. As Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber argue in their book [The Slow Professor](#), we can challenge the culture of speed in higher education by slowing down, questioning unreasonable expectations, and bringing pleasure back into the work. Tricia Hersey theorizes [rest as a form of resistance](#) against systemic oppression. So, as much as possible, find moments throughout the summer to rest, recuperate, and replenish your energies. Take part in activities that bring you joy: gardening, swimming, biking, dancing, cooking, and more. Go for walks in the park. Practice yoga or meditation. You will be a healthier teacher, researcher, and colleague if you carve out time for rest and relaxation.

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## Reflect on your Pedagogical Values

Build those values into your course design, your syllabus, and your policies. If you cannot identify your pedagogical values, then start by addressing some key questions: What inspired you to pursue a career in teaching? What characteristics or qualities come to mind when you think of successful teachers? What makes you feel pride in your own teaching? As you write out answers to those questions, you could consult this [Teaching Values Handout](#). Think about which words from that list stand out to you. Then, select five words to form the “roots” of your teaching practice.

Once you identify your pedagogical values, you can make decisions about your courses with those values in mind. For example, if you value collaboration, then maybe you could incorporate group activities or team-based learning into your courses this fall. Or, if you value diversity, then you could assign a range of readings that reflect multiple voices and perspectives. Or, if you place value on joy, then you might develop assignments that you would actually enjoy grading. By using our pedagogical values as a framework for course design, we can work

smarter, not harder. We can cut out the elements that are inconsistent with our values, making our teaching more sustainable in the long run.



## Design your Courses with Passion

Build joy into your courses - for yourselves and your students. Think about why you fell in love with your discipline, what brought you into higher education in the first place. Incorporate moments of excitement, engagement, and interaction into the course. Focus on building community as much as possible.

One way of reducing stress, cultivating joy, and being sustainable in our teaching would be to use [Robert Talbert's 12-week plan](#) for designing courses. Talbert proposes building a semester around 12 weeks of content instead of the usual 15. That saves a week at the beginning of the semester for “onboarding,” which includes introductory activities, reading through the syllabus, practicing with the course technology, and establishing expectations for the course. Then the last two weeks would give students time to review what they have learned throughout the semester, catch up on late assignments, revise their work, give presentations, and study for exams. Talbert’s approach can help us be more intentional about pacing our courses, especially since students often return from fall break with little to no energy. Anticipating those peaks and lulls in the semester can make the experience more enjoyable for everyone.

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### Reminder to Submit Final Grades

Final grades for Spring 2023 are due on **Tuesday, May 16**. Please consult this [Grade Entry Guide](#) for further information.

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## Summer 2023 Opportunity Culturally Responsive Teaching Certification CASEPS Workshop

[Register Now](#)

June 13-14, 2023: 8:30AM - 4:00PM

Cost: \$695/attendee

Culture and diversity influence educational, social, psychological, and social experiences. To that end, the [Council for At-risk Student Education and Professional Standards \(CASEPS\)](#) provides professional development and accreditation for institutions and individual materials that apply a cultural lens approach (CLA).

The UMSL community looks forward to a unique opportunity to attend the culturally responsive teaching certification program through the Council for At Risk Student Education and Professional Standards (CASEPS). These standards are used in accreditation for course materials (e.g., syllabi), courses, programs, and departments. Post-session support will support you throughout this process, which will also be facilitated by a premiere scholar of leadership and education, [Dr. Courtney Plotts, National Chair](#).

## Outcomes | What you will achieve

This certification is being designed to address the following institutional outcomes:

- Increased cultural competence and responsiveness of faculty and staff
- Evidence of cultural competence and cultural responsiveness in course design and teaching

These outcomes will be achieved upon completion of the following:

- Certification in Culturally Responsive Teaching
- National Accreditation of course materials by submitting evidence for 13 standard domains

Questions? Contact Keeta Holmes ([holmeskm@umsystem.edu](mailto:holmeskm@umsystem.edu)) or Erin Whitteck ([erin.l.whitteck@umsystem.edu](mailto:erin.l.whitteck@umsystem.edu)).

[Register for the CASEPS Workshop](#)

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## Apply Now for Student Support this Fall

*The Center for Teaching and Learning offers two student support programs: the Supplemental Instruction (SI) program and the Active Learning Assistant (ALA) program. If you have questions about which program would be the best for you and your students, please contact Assistant Director Jenna Alexander ([alexanderjm@umsystem.edu](mailto:alexanderjm@umsystem.edu)). Applications for both programs will be accepted on a rolling basis, but priority will be given to faculty who request an SI or ALA before **Friday, May 26th**.*

### Supplemental Instruction Program

The [Supplemental Instruction \(SI\) program](#) supports students in large, required, and/or challenging courses. In the SI program, faculty works closely with a student who has taken the

course before and done well (called an "SI Leader"). The SI Leader attends class, assists with class activities, and serves as a model student. The SI Leader also holds regular study sessions outside of class for students. These SI sessions give students opportunities to teach and learn from one another in smaller group settings. Data show that students who participate in SI earn higher grades, feel more engaged in the course, and are more likely to reenroll and graduate.

### [Request Supplemental Instruction](#)

## **Active Learning Assistant Program**

The [Active Learning Assistant \(ALA\) program](#) supports faculty who want to create more engaging, collaborative, and student-centered courses. Faculty work with a student leader (called an "Active Learning Assistant") to incorporate more active learning into their courses. ALAs attend weekly workshops with Assistant Director Jenna Alexander to receive pedagogical training on various topics: providing feedback, facilitating discussions, studying effectively, and more. The ALAs also meet with faculty for weekly preparation sessions, so student voices can be incorporated into the design and delivery of the course.

### [Request an Active Learning Assistant](#)

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## **Apply for the Tritons as Partners Program**

*The Center for Teaching and Learning offers a unique form of professional development through the Tritons as Partners program. Applications for the program will be accepted on a rolling basis, but priority will be given to faculty who request a student partner before **Thursday, June 1st**.*

### **What are Tritons as Partners?**

Tritons as Partners are undergraduate students who observe your course and regularly give you feedback through weekly meetings. They are not content experts but instead context experts. They are experts in being students here at UMSL and provide a unique perspective on your course.

### **Program Feedback:**

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Eleven faculty members/partners have participated in a program pilot and received positive feedback about the experience. What faculty are saying about the program:

- "It gives me a space to reflect on my teaching regularly."
- "The weekly notes are amazing; they give me small actionable things to address in my teaching that I can use in my other courses."

### **Time Investment and Benefits**

The average time investment reported by faculty is one hour per week: a half hour per week on the weekly meeting and a half hour to digest and respond to the feedback. At the end of the program, faculty are provided with a summary of the semester's work that they can submit as part of the annual review or tenure and promotion.

### **Who?**

We have focused on faculty in their first few years at UMSL but have opened this opportunity up to all interested faculty, but spots are limited. In Fall 2023, we will support up to seven student-faculty partnerships.

### **More information:**

A more detailed description of the program can be found [here](#).

Please do not hesitate to contact CTL Assistant Director Erin Whitteck with any questions you may have.

[Request a Triton Partner](#)

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## **Meet New Colleagues**

*Each newsletter will feature full-time faculty who have recently joined us at UMSL. Please welcome our new colleagues to campus.*

### **David Wacyk, Department of Music**



Dr. David Wacyk serves as Assistant Teaching Professor of Music and Director of Instrumental Activities at University of Missouri-St. Louis. He conducts the UMSL Orchestra and UMSL Wind Ensemble, coordinates the "Triton Sound" Pep

Band, and teaches courses in Conducting. Prior to his arrival at UMSL, Dr. Wacyk was Director of Instrumental Music at Saint Martin's University, and previously taught instrumental conducting at Towson University.

Dr. Wacyk maintains an active schedule as a guest conductor and presenter throughout the United States, including as a Conductor for Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp in Michigan. His scholarship focuses on the avant-garde and modernist wind music of twentieth-century composers, and as a passionate advocate for new music, he has led discussions on re-evaluating existing systems of concertizing, commissioning and addressing systemic inadequacies in collegiate bands and orchestras. Dr. Wacyk holds a D.M.A. and a M.M. in Conducting from University of Maryland, and a B.M. Education from Western Michigan University.

## **Colleen Mpofu, Department of Accounting**



Colleen McClain Mpofu joined UMSL as accounting faculty in the fall of 2022. Teaching is a second career for her, as she brings over 20 years of experience in corporate cost accounting to her new role. Colleen received a Bachelor of Science in accounting and finance from Indiana University – Indianapolis, an MBA from Indiana Wesleyan University, and a DBA from UMSL. Prior to joining academia full-time, Colleen spent many years leading accounting processes in large manufacturing firms, such as Ingredion, Inc. and PepsiCo. She also served as an adjunct instructor for a local university and community college in her hometown of Indianapolis, Indiana, which is where she fell in love with teaching. Additionally, Colleen owns her



own small business providing bookkeeping, income tax preparation, and small business coaching and serves on multiple boards of directors for non-profit community organizations. Colleen teaches A2400 Foundations of Financial Accounting, A3411 Cost Accounting, and A5411 Cost Systems Design. She is one of the faculty advisors for the newly founded National Association of Black Accountants (NABA) student chapter at UMSL. Her recent research included increasing strategic collaboration between accountants and other business leaders, automation in the workforce, and ChatGPT's performance on accounting assessments. In her free time, Colleen enjoys traveling, learning about other cultures, spending time with family and friends, relaxing in the park or near a body of water, and serving in the community. This summer, she is looking forward to exploring more of St. Louis, especially the culture and art scene.

## **Kaitlyn Quinn, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice**



Katie Quinn is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice. Prior to joining the faculty at UMSL, she was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Toronto (Canada) and a Research Associate at the University of Nottingham (UK). She received a Ph.D. in Sociology also from the University of Toronto.

Katie's research focuses on how non-profit organizations and adjacent community actors participate in criminal justice processes and contend with criminal justice problems, especially as they relate to gender and crime. Her current projects draw on qualitative research methods to advance scholarly understandings of how

punishment operates in and through communities, demonstrate how and why helping relationships can reproduce and/or contest existing social inequalities, and account for variegation and contestation beneath the veneers of penal stability and consensus.

Katie moved to St. Louis with her wife last summer. Outside of work, she enjoys spending time in Forest Park, playing board games, and swimming.

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## Student Voice: Peer Support Transforms Lives

*Throughout the year, we will be incorporating student voices into the newsletter. The Center for Teaching and Learning greatly values student voices in all aspects of teaching, from design to delivery. Students chosen are current [Active Learning Assistants or Supplemental Instructors](#). Lizzie Closser is a secondary education major and an Active Learning Assistant for Biology 1012: General Biology.*

My name is Lizzie and I am a fourth-year student here at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. I came to UMSL for a great college experience, and I have enjoyed all the time that I've spent on campus getting to know many phenomenal and inspiring individuals, including students, professors and staff. I chose UMSL because it was familiar territory; my older sister attended nursing school here, and I have always felt comfortable following in her footsteps. I am glad that I chose UMSL, because I have learned so much from this campus that I will be taking with me into the future, especially a new mindset on peer support.

One of the most unique perspectives I've gained from UMSL is the impact of peer support that I've received. I came into college feeling very self-reliant, as I have always considered myself to be an intelligent and capable person. But an experience that I encountered my first semester (Fall 2019), before the pandemic broke out, is one that I will never forget. It was my very first semester at UMSL, and I was yearning for an exciting college experience. I was motivated, full of life, and ready to prove myself as someone who could achieve amazing things. In my freshman biology course, I met and spent time in study sessions with our Supplemental Instructor (SI), who provided support and access to help with the content and material in the course. Her name was Ruth, and based on our interactions in lecture, I could tell that she was very, very bright. I was nervous going into my first SI session because I didn't want her to think that I wasn't smart. I assumed that SI was for students who struggled to understand complex

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concepts, and I didn't want her first impression of me to be that I was incompetent on my own. I was intimidated by her, but inspired at the same time. I wondered, *how do I become more like her?*

In the session, I realized that she had a fascinating way of teaching and guiding that I hadn't come across before, and I knew it was a valuable asset to my learning. She was very welcoming and validating of my reluctance to ask for help as a first-year student. She used a chalkboard to draw figures for me and my friends when we weren't understanding things, and she had a way of describing scientific events that was much more detailed and visual than what we encountered in a lecture. It was my first time relying on another student to reinforce my own knowledge, and it felt so much better to have my misunderstandings ironed out by a peer instead of the professor. Because of this encounter, I was inspired to become a leader of my own, taking me down the path of becoming an Active Learning Assistant (ALA) for several biology courses, and I strive to make a positive impact on the students I support just as Ruth did for me. Although many of the students that I support as an ALA have had to endure challenges due to the pandemic, I have been thrilled to be a part of their learning journeys. After all, learning looked different during the pandemic, for teachers and students, and I was very lucky to have had an experience early on that reduced the fear of asking someone else for help. Students who didn't have the in-person experience during the pandemic were forced to be a lot more independent as classes moved online. The demands for self-reliance, time management, and self-regulation increased to levels far greater than even I felt in my first year. This means that many students needed peer support even more during the pandemic, but may have felt isolated and hesitant to reach out for help. Because of this, I like to use my ALA platform to perform many outreach behaviors for students, especially when I support online classes. If Ruth hadn't reached out during my freshman year, I may not be the peer supporter that I am today, so I try my hardest to be that lending hand for other students.

What I want the staff and faculty here at UMSL to know is that many students are coming to college feeling very independent, as they should. However, my mindset completely changed after I experienced the benefits of peer support, and I think many others could have a similar encounter as well. My story, for example, exhibits how a young, individualistic mindset bloomed into something more mature and collaborative after I realized that needing help does not equal incompetency. I no longer think that learning from a peer is something of a last-ditch effort; rather I gravitate toward it before going higher up in my search for assistance. I learned so much about peer support and the capacity it has to foster deeper, more critical ideas, as long as students first take the leap toward accepting the support. The resources that UMSL provides (such as ALAs, SIs, and lab TAs) are unique in that they have cultivated a trusting place of learning for myself and others over the years. I have realized that it is no longer just myself and my professors that I trust with my learning. I have learned to trust the friends I've made, the peers I've met, and those incredible students that assist in the most challenging classes I've taken at UMSL. I am proud to be one of those students who transforms lives and leaves an impact on others.

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# About the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL)

The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), a division of the Office of Academic Affairs, supports the professional development of those who teach and learn at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Our goals - to promote engagement in courses, on campus, and in the community - enhance the University as we align our activities, services, and consultations with the campus goals to promote excellence in teaching, research, and service.

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